

## "The Shepherd's Charge; The Flock's Response" – 1 Peter 5:1-7

We've come to the fifth and final chapter in our journey through the First Epistle of Peter. Peter has been teaching us how we are to live as Christians in a culture that is hostile to Christianity. Consistently, he has exhorted us to respond in a way that glorifies Jesus Christ. That means we must not respond in the manner that is characteristic of this world.

The world's system is in control of our enemy.

*Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time." (Revelation 12:12)*

We are to overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of our testimony, and by the fact that we do not love our lives to the death. (Revelation 12:11) So what does that look like? When we are persecuted for the cause of Christ, we respond by praying for those who persecute us. We return love for hate. We return blessing for cursing. As Paul exhorts us in the book of Romans,

*Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (Romans 12:17-18)*

The hard truth is, as the Day of Jesus' return draws near, the persecution of Christians is going to get much worse. Jesus told us so. It is vitally important that we continued to be plugged into the Church. We need to consistently ...

*... consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25)*

We need to be prepared. We need to be ready to support one another. That means we need to be absolutely confident in the promises given to us in scripture. We need to know what we believe and we need to know why we believe it. We need to be able to clearly articulate the reason for the hope that lies within us.

Our local church helps us with our preparation, so it is not surprising to me that as the Fifth Chapter begins, Peter talks about how we should perform as a church body. First, he gives a stern charge to those called to spiritual leadership and then he exhorts the rest of the church fellowship. He addresses the shepherd's charge and the flock's response.

Let's read the first part of our text for this morning:

*The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. (1 Peter 5:1-4)*

One of the keys to Biblical interpretation is to always remember who is speaking (or writing) and who the author is writing to. Well, we know the writer is Peter. Peter is an Apostle of the Lamb, and as such, he has apostolic authority. We also know that he was writing to Christian churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. But in

these four verses, he is addressing a specific audience, namely the “elders who are among you”

The Greek word translated “elder” is *presbuteros* (πρεσβύτερος). Literally, it means an older person, but in context, it is generally understood to be a leader of the congregation. In fact, it doesn’t refer so much to age as it does to the calling to leadership. Timothy, for example, was a relatively young man, but he was called to be a *presbuteros*. Paul told him:

*Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. (1 Timothy 4:12)*

So again, this refers not so much to age as it does to spiritual maturity. Peter is addressing those in the churches who have been called to spiritual leadership. Those, like me, who are in pastoral ministry are definitely included, but it’s more than me. It is anyone who exhibits spiritual leadership. It certainly includes the elders, deacons and deaconesses who our church board and there are other mature Christians in our body who, although they don’t hold an official position of leadership, could definitely be called elders.

No question, Peter is addressing me here, along with all who are called to church leadership. And he speaks with authority, first, as a fellow elder – he identifies with those in leadership. He knows what leaders go through because he’s going through it too. And secondly, as with Apostolic authority: A witness to Christ’s sufferings.

Peter was there. He saw the miracles, the authoritative teaching. He witnessed the arrest and the first trial, although that was the occasion for Peter’s worst moment. He saw the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension. And Peter was personally restored and recommissioned by Jesus to feed His flock. (John 29)

But more than that, Peter, along with John and James, was greatly privileged to be a witness of Jesus’ glory. On the Mount of Transfiguration, he saw Jesus transformed into heavenly radiance. He saw Moses and Elijah conversing with Him. It was a sneak preview of what every Christian will see when we meet Jesus face to face ... and it will be utterly astounding. That’s what Peter means when he describes himself as a partaker of the glory that will be revealed.

As a *presbuteros* – an elder – my charge is to shepherd the flock. In fact, the title pastor literally refers to a herdsman, or a shepherd, which would make you what? Yep, that makes you the flock. This is a really common metaphor in the Bible. For example, at one point Jesus had great compassion for a crowd of people because ...

*... because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. (Matthew 9:36)*

You know, domestic sheep are really pretty helpless without a shepherd. If they wander away from the flock, they really have no survival skills at all. They’ll never find water by themselves ... they need to be led, and they have to have clean, still water. I understand they won’t drink from a stream. They need to be led to pasture. I read one account that claimed that a sheep with a fully grown fleece can’t even get up by itself if it happens to fall on its back. Remember that when your pastor talks about his flock! The job of shepherding in Peter’s day was incredibly hard, dirty work. Shepherds were at the low end of the socio-economic scale. They were certainly not highly regarded. Mommas, don’t let your babies grow up to be shepherds!

This is the job I have been given, but I have to remember that those under my care do not belong to me. I am an under-shepherd. You are God’s flock and you are incredibly

important to God. He loves you so much that He sent Jesus to die for you while you were still sinners.

And yes, you are sinners. You are incapable of living your lives in a way that will get you to heaven. The only way you can possibly get there is by accepting the sacrifice Jesus made on your behalf. Just believe! The work of God is to believe in the One whom He sent and if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead you will be saved. You won't find heaven on your own; you need to be led to still waters.

God has charged me with leading you. I had better take this charge seriously! And if you have been called to be an elder, you'd better take it seriously too. Shepherd the flock of God that is among you.

What does shepherding God's flock involve? First of all, God's flock needs to be fed and folks, you need the very best food! Paul charged Timothy, and he charges me:

*Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. (2 Timothy 4:2)*

Your food is every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. This Bible is your food. Please understand, as your pastor, I have no authority at all apart from the word of God. If I preach from this Bible, I can confidently say "Thus saith the Lord". If I do anything else, don't listen to me! You need to be fed from the Word of God. You will starve; you will perish; you will fall away if you are not subjected to the truth found in this Book.

Related to that, the flock needs to be protected from false teachers who offer poisonous food. Paul continues his exhortation to pastors:

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Timothy 4:3-5)*

And Jesus said:

*For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. (Matthew 24:24)*

Let me tell you, it's not easy to protect you from deceivers. People these days have such easy access to heresy, deceivers on TV, deceivers on the Internet, deceivers in Christian bookstores, deceivers filling so many pulpits across the land. I have to watch what you're eating and keep you away from the poison.

Elders are to be overseers, *Episkepeo*, in the Greek. It means to exercise oversight, to watch out for. But notice how we are to do so in the proper way: willingly, not by compulsion, eagerly, not for dishonest gain and not as lords, but as examples. It is the principle of servant-leadership. It is the way it is supposed to be in God's kingdom. Jesus said:

*"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— (Matthew 20:25-27)*

If you are an elder, a *presbuteros*, you are called to service. It's not about gaining power and influence. It's certainly not about getting rich at the flock's expense. It is about faithful

service. And although there are numerous reward for being a faithful pastor, a faithful elder, a faithful deacon, the real reward is deferred.

*... and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. (1 Peter 5:4)*

It is never about here, never about right now. It is about the new heaven and the new earth. It is about being commended by Jesus, the Chief Shepherd: “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

So, in a local church, you have a pastor and you have other elders. They are called to care for God’s flock, to lead them, to feed them, to protect them. How should the flock respond?

*Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. (1 Peter 5:5a)*

Oh boy, there’s that dreaded “s” word again. It’s hard for us to think about submitting, because we all want to be in control of our own lives. We don’t want anyone to “be the boss of me”. But this is not blind obedience. Yes, all of you should submit, that is you should follow those who are spiritually more mature, but here’s where the sheep metaphor begins to break down; you need to learn to show some discernment. You need to learn do distinguish between faithful shepherds and false ones.

Paul said to the Corinthians:

*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1)*

I should say the same thing to you. It follows, though, that if I’m not imitating Christ, you shouldn’t imitate me. I need to be held accountable to you just as you are held accountable by me. Test every teaching. Be like the Bereans who searched the scriptures daily to see if these things are so. Don’t be a lazy sheep!

As we live and grow as a church, we need to check our egos at the door.

*Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "GOD RESISTS THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE." Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:5-7)*

Jesus loves you. If you call on the name of the Lord, you have become part of His body. This local church is part of the body of Christ! It’s not about who’s in charge, because Jesus must be in charge. We are to humble ourselves before Him. We are to submit to one another, or as Paul puts it:

*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)*

It is the shepherd’s charge and the flock’s response; we all must be looking out for one another. When we do, the church is built up. Individual Christians are built up, and Jesus is glorified.

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we*

*should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:11-16)*